



Conversion WAS THE KEY

By Beverly Fitzgerald

Although my family had been members of the Church for many generations, when I was growing up, my parents, siblings, and I rarely attended church. My parents saw to it that each of their seven children was baptized at age eight. But before and after our baptisms, our church attendance was limited to three- or four-week spurts followed by months of staying home.

I don't know that there was a particular reason we didn't go. I think more than anything, it was a matter of whether we felt like it when Sunday rolled around. Culturally, we were Latter-day Saints in many ways. We had copies of the scriptures in our home, but we never read them. We had food storage, but we never talked about why it was important. And when we went to church, it was just something to do.

Shortly after high school graduation I moved from my home in Seattle, Washington, USA, to Essex, Massachusetts, USA. In this small New England town in the late 1970s, I met Rob, the man who would become my husband. After we married we moved across the United States to Washington State to be close to my family.

Rob was not a member of the Church, and I followed the pattern I had been raised with: I rarely attended sacrament meeting, or any church meeting for that matter. But as our oldest child approached her eighth birthday, I wanted her to be baptized as I had been. Some weeks before Theresa's birthday, I decided she should meet with the missionaries. Rob would sometimes listen in on the discussions, usually from the doorway. But with each succeeding lesson, he listened more and stayed longer. By the time the missionaries

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BECOMING TRULY CONVERTED

"To receive the blessings promised from true conversion, make the changes that you know are needed in your life now. The Savior said: 'Will ye not now return unto me, and repent of your sins, and be converted, that I may heal you? . . . If ye will come unto me ye shall have eternal life.' "

Elder Richard G. Scott of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, "Full Conversion Brings Happiness," *Ensign*, May 2002, 26.

had taught Theresa all of the lessons, they had two baptisms scheduled: hers and Rob's.

Rob's joining the Church revitalized our family's attendance for a while, but after a few years we became less active again. As with my parents, there wasn't anything particular keeping us from the gospel; usually it was a matter of just wanting to stay in bed rather than getting up and getting everyone ready to go. It was a pattern I knew well.

After eight years of living in Washington, our family returned to New England. We attended the local ward for a while, but never consistently. Before long, we stopped going altogether. In the years that followed, our only contact with the Church was with the missionaries, who came regularly to have dinner with us. We felt affection for them and were always glad to have them join us.

Sometimes the missionaries would invite

Rob to join them at their teaching appointments. Around 1996, the missionaries were teaching a man Rob had grown up with and the man's family. After several weeks, the man's wife said to Rob: "We've been going to church for weeks. When are we going to see you guys [meaning our family] there?"

The question stunned Rob, and he came home and told me about it. We realized that we had waffled long enough. It was time for us to make a decision. We realized our lives were better in the Church than out of it, and we committed to each other that we were going to change for good. We began attending church consistently and accepted callings. We started reading the Book of Mormon. A year later, our family was sealed in the Washington D.C. Temple. The intervening years have been full of rich opportunities to grow and serve.



We've witnessed amazing things happen because of our commitment and conversion. I have seen Heavenly Father's hand in the lives of our children, who are now in their 20s and 30s. Like me, they have all had periods of being less active. Some of them have returned to the Church and have been sealed to their families in the temple. Some of them have not yet done so, but we trust Heavenly Father and His timing and continue to pray for them. I have seen from my own experience and from watching my children that we don't always know His ways and that His ways are higher than our ways (see Isaiah 55:9). There have been times when I have offered soul-wrenching prayers in their behalf and have wondered if Heavenly Father has heard those prayers or if He has simply forgotten us. I have since discovered that He has always been aware of us and involved in our lives. He is working in our lives and in the lives of those we love in ways we cannot possibly imagine.

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family members. Since Rob and I have returned to the Church, my mother and sister have come back to the Church as well. Both have received their temple endowment, and both tell us that their return is due in part to conversations with Rob and me about our own experiences with returning to full Church activity. Small changes for one or two people can lead to powerful things happening in wider circles. What Alma taught is true: "By small and simple things are great things brought to pass" (Alma 37:6).

What did it take for this turnaround to happen? I think the first step was for us to decide to decide. We had to stick to our decision, which meant going to church consistently. It also meant being nourished—reading the Book of Mormon has played an especially important role for our family. Once we were doing those things, the Holy Ghost had the opportunity to work in us, to truly convert us.

Even though I grew up with food storage, the scriptures, and occasional church attendance, I can see now that I wasn't truly converted. That conversion is what I was missing all those years—it has made all the difference. ■